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PHOTO BY MARK C. ROBINSON/WRANGELL SENTINEL

Flower shop takes root

Artha DeRuyter prepares to move her blooming business from a boat to a brick-and-mortar shop on Zimovia Highway. See story on Page 6.

Environmental group petitions to list king salmon as an endangered species

BY NATHANIEL HERZ
Northern Journal

A Washington state-based environmental group says it's filing a petition asking the Biden administration to list southern Alaska king salmon as an endangered species — following through on notice of intent it filed last year.

The Wild Fish Conservancy's 68-page petition says the king salmon, also known as chinook, are threatened by climate change and competition from hatchery-raised fish, and that state and federal management plans are failing to stem their decline.

The petition targets all populations that use the Gulf of Alaska, including fish that spawn in the Kenai and Kaslof rivers outside Anchorage, in the Taku, Stikine and Unuk rivers in Southeast and in the Alaska Peninsula's Chignik River.

"While Alaska is often perceived as having abundant salmon populations, scientists have been sounding the alarm for decades that Alaska's chinook are in dire trouble," the conservancy said in a statement emailed to supporters Thursday, Jan. 11

"Despite existing management plans and years of efforts by state resource managers, Alaska's own data shows the majority of chinook populations throughout the state have experienced significant decline, not only in abundance, but also in size and diversity."

In a press release, a conservancy biologist and petition co-author, Conrad Gowell, added: "Ironically, certifiers and the seafood industry are leading concerned consumers to believe chinook from Alaska are sustainable, when in fact they are disappearing before our very eyes. No one wants to be eating the last wild chinook from any river."

The organization's petition is likely to be politically polarizing: It could lead to sharp restrictions on fishing for chinook, and Alaska's state government has previously fought the listing of many other species, citing the potential for impacts on development.

Attorney Anna Crary, a partner at Anchorage law firm Landye Bennett Blumstein, said listing as an endangered species

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Wrangell goes after \$25 million grant to rebuild harbor floats

BY LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

The borough will spend about \$80,000 for an engineering report, cost estimates and conceptual drawings in hopes of winning a \$25 million federal grant to rebuild the Inner Harbor, Reliance and Standard Oil floats.

The grant application is due by Feb. 28, pushing the borough and its contractor, PND Engineers, with offices

in Juneau and Anchorage, into an accelerated schedule to meet the deadline.

If the federal grant comes through, the work will include new floats, ramps, pilings, electrical service and dredging, explained Interim Borough Manager Mason Villarma.

Though the seaplane float also needs work, Villarma said, the grant program sets a maximum at \$25 million, and the project is likely already at the limit.

Wrangell will apply for design and construction funds from the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant program. "The docks' infrastructure has been in a poor and deteriorated condition for many years and needs to be replaced," according to a report presented to the assembly by Amber Al-Haddad, capital facilities director.

The assembly on Jan. 9 approved unanimously

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Dividend, school funding will again dominate legislative session

BY LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

State lawmakers went back to work this week in Juneau, with two familiar topics likely to dominate the budget-writing work.

"The real question is what are we going to do for the Permanent Fund dividend ... and what are we going to do for education," Rep. Dan Ortiz told the Wrangell borough assembly Jan. 9.

"That's what the argument is going to be about."

Ortiz, a retired school-teacher in Ketchikan, also represents Wrangell and Metlakatla. He's been in the state House since January 2015 and serves on the Finance Committee, which is in charge of the budget.

The representative said he supports an increase in the state funding formula for public schools, while Gov. Mike Dunleavy has proposed a spending plan for the fiscal

year that starts July 1 which provides no increase in the funding formula for K-12 education.

There has not been a permanent increase in the formula since the 2016-2017 school year, much to the frustration of school districts across Alaska.

The governor's proposed budget, however, would pay out a much larger dividend this fall, estimated at about \$3,400. His budget uses a formula in state statute from the 1980s that legislators and governors have not followed since 2015 when declining state revenues and general fund budget deficits made the so-called "full dividend" unaffordable without large-scale cuts to public services and/or new taxes.

The governor's dividend would be two and a half times the size of last year's \$1,312 payout.

With such a large dividend for 2024, Dunleavy's budget shows a deficit of almost \$1 bil-

lion, which he proposes to take from the state's dwindling savings account.

Ortiz told the assembly he disagrees with that plan.

"A PFD of that size is just not sustainable," he said, showing the math that paying

out large dividends would drain the Permanent Fund earnings reserve, resulting in the demise of the annual payment.

"It made us nervous last year," he said of his colleagues, "and it makes us nervous this

year."

The governor and his large-dividend supporters have battled in recent years with advocates for a smaller, affordable dividend that would not drain the Permanent Fund's re-

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Advocates of higher minimum wage close to winning spot on Alaska ballot

BY YERETH ROSEN
Alaska Beacon

Supporters of a ballot initiative that would increase Alaska's minimum wage, mandate paid sick leave and provide other worker protections submitted more than 40,000 petition signatures to the Alaska Division of Elections on Jan. 9, bringing their cause one step closer to a decision by voters.

The group, called Better Jobs for Alaska, brought boxes of signed petitions to a Division of Elections office in Anchorage.

The initiative proposes to hike the state's minimum wage, currently at \$11.73 an hour, to \$13

an hour next year, \$14 an hour in 2026 and \$15 an hour in 2027. Thereafter, the minimum wage would increase with inflation, according to the initiative.

The signatures must now be counted and verified by the lieutenant governor's office before the initiative can be certified and the question placed on the November ballot.

"Over 32,000 Alaskan workers, in households with 22,000 children, will get a raise by 2027 when this goes to \$15 an hour," Ed Flanagan, a former state labor commissioner who is one of the primary sponsors of the initiative, said at a

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Senior Center Menu

Open for in-person dining. Must be fully vaccinated.

Thursday, Jan. 18

Chili with beef and cheese, spicy fruit cup, tossed salad, cornbread

Friday, Jan. 19

Tantalizing oatmeal chicken, steamed spinach, calico salad, rice

Monday, Jan. 22

Closed. Shelf-stable meal delivered on Friday, Jan. 19

Tuesday, Jan. 23

Turkey curry, steamed zucchini, fruit slaw, rice

Wednesday, Jan. 24

Baked chicken, copper pennies, triple bean salad, whole wheat roll, fruit

Call the senior center at 907-874-2066 24 hours in advance to reserve a seat at lunch or to request delivery.

The senior van is available to take seniors to medical appointments, errands such as collecting mail, getting prescriptions or other essential items.

Ferry Schedule

Northbound

Friday, Jan. 19

Kennicott, 5 p.m.

Friday, Jan. 26

Kennicott, 9:45 p.m.

Friday, Feb. 2

Kennicott, 4:45 p.m.

Friday, Feb. 9

Kennicott, 8:45 p.m.

Southbound

Monday, Jan. 22

Kennicott, 4:45 a.m.

Monday, Jan. 29

Kennicott, 8:30 a.m.

Monday, Feb. 5

Kennicott, 7:30 a.m.

Monday, Feb. 12

Kennicott, 8 a.m.

Listings are scheduled departure times. Call the terminal at 907-874-2021 for information or 907-874-3711 for recorded information.

Tides

High Tides

Low Tides

	AM		PM		AM		PM	
	Time	Ft	Time	Ft	Time	Ft	Time	Ft
Jan. 17	05:06	16.4	05:27	13.5	11:16	1.8	11:19	1.7
Jan. 18	06:01	16.1	06:45	12.2	....	...	12:24	1.9
Jan. 19	07:04	15.8	08:10	11.7	00:16	3.3	01:40	1.7
Jan. 20	08:10	15.8	09:29	11.9	01:23	4.6	02:59	1.1
Jan. 21	09:15	16.0	10:35	12.6	02:40	5.2	04:10	0.3
Jan. 22	10:14	16.3	11:31	13.4	03:56	5.2	05:07	-0.6
Jan. 23	11:06	16.6	....	...	04:58	4.8	05:52	-1.2



ALASKA AIRLINES CLUB 49 COMMUNITY EVENTS CALENDAR

WRANGELL MARINERS' MEMORIAL board members will be available to assist in completing applications to add names to the commemorative plaques from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesday, Jan. 17, at the Nolan Center. Applications are available online at wrangellmarinersmemorial.com. Donations and memberships are also accepted online.

BUSINESS TRAINING series provided online by Tongass Federal Credit Union from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan 18: How to Create a Business Plan. Feb. 15: Financial Planning Projections. The series is free and open to the public. Go online at: TongassFCU.com/TheCommons.

NOLAN CENTER THEATER - No movies until the end of January.

CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST for stories, fiction, non-fiction and poetry sponsored by the Anchorage Daily News. Submissions due Feb. 15 and open to all ages. Enter at adn.com/creativewritingcontest.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT, if you or someone you know needs mental health or suicide crisis support, call or text 988 or chat at 988Lifeline.org. When you call 988, you will be connected with a trained crisis counselor who can offer help, confidential support and connection to resources. #CallCareline #CrisisIntervention #SuicidePrevention #SomeoneToTalkTo

WRANGELL PARKS and RECREATION is offering multiple activities to get your body moving. For more information on any of the activities and more visit www.wrangellrec.com or call 907-874-2444.

- **PICKLEBALL** noon to 2 p.m. Tuesdays, 7 to 9 p.m. Fridays and 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Sundays at the community center gym for ages 14 and up. \$5 drop-in fee. Wear athletic clothing and bring gym shoes.
- **ARTHRITIS CLASS** 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday at the community center multi-purpose room for ages 18 and up. \$5 drop-in fee.
- **WINTER WORKOUT CHALLENGE** through March 31 is built to encourage consistent movement, with a goal of completing at least 30 minutes of exercise 5 to 6 days per week. This challenge is for people of ALL fitness levels. The participant who completes the most workouts within the challenge dates will win a six-month pass to the Parks and Recreation facility; prizes donated by local businesses will be raffled off at the end of the challenge. For ages 14 and up. Registration required for this free activity.

Continuing Events

PARKS and RECREATION www.wrangellrec.com

Open swim is open by appointment. Locker rooms are available.

Arthritis class, 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. Monday, Wednesday, Friday.

Lap swim, 6 to 7:30 a.m. Monday, Wednesday, Friday.

Lap/tot swim, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. weekdays, 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Thursday, and 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturday.

Open swim, 6 to 7 p.m. Monday and Wednesday; 6 to 7 p.m. Friday; 1 to 2 p.m. Saturday.

Water aerobics class, 10 to 11 a.m. Monday, Wednesday, Friday.

Weight room: 6 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and 3:30 to 7:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 6 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and 3:30 to 8:30 p.m. Friday; 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Saturday.

AA Meetings: North Star Group meets from 7 to 8 p.m. Tuesdays and Fridays, St. Philip's Episcopal Church.

Want more attendance at your meeting or event? Send information for Roundup to wrgsent@gmail.com or call 907-874-2301.

The Way We Were In the Sentinel 100, 75, 50 and 25 years ago.

Jan. 17, 1924

The Women's Council held their regular meeting last Friday afternoon at 3 o'clock and continued their work for planning a program for the year. In connection with the plans for the coming tourist season, a committee for totems and their preservation was appointed as follows: Mrs. Prichett, Mrs. Palmer, Mrs. Case, Mrs. Wheeler and Mrs. Waters. Totem committees have been appointed from time to time from various organizations, and little has been accomplished, but in view of the fact that many of the totems must be cared for sooner or be lost, and that some excellent suggestions have been made for their care, the new committee

hopes to report progress at the next meeting.

Jan. 14, 1949

Recent pictures in national magazines and in the press service showed President Harry Truman receiving a gift of two turkeys for the White House Christmas dinner table. One of the birds, a white one, seemed to be giving the president a bad time, but the other, a dark, 40-pound, well-behaved potential platter-full, was from the well known turkey farm of Grayson McCulley, of Maple Plain, Minnesota. Mr. McCulley is a cousin of Lloyd Benjamin, of Benjamin's Store in Wrangell. Accompanying the McCulley gift bird to the White House was

a short note from the donor: "Here is one Tom that got into the White House," referring to Tom Dewey, who lost to Truman in the 1948 election.

Jan. 16, 1974

The city council has authorized City Manager Herb McNabb to sell 11 city-owned lots in the Lemieux Subdivision off Zimovia Highway south of the state housing project. McNabb said the unimproved lots, which are covered with scrub timber, front on Zimovia Avenue running north and south and on Ash Street, which runs east and west and links the subdivision with Zimovia Highway. Sewer and water lines have been installed in the area

but street improvements have to be completed before the lots can go up for sale, McNabb said. He estimated the sealed-bid sale will take place in March. The lots are 100 by 78 feet and largely level, McNabb said. The city stipulates that buyers of the lots must have improvements 80% complete within two years of the sale or forfeit the land. The area is zoned for single-family and duplex dwellings.

Jan. 14, 1999

Noting that the Wrangell City Council has done its share to lighten the long winter days of not only its citizens, but those of the entire state and even nation, Mayor Bill Privett said that nonetheless the issue of cats was

brought to the council by a member of the public and must be dealt with. The issue arose when Maureen Maxand, owner of a local pet store, approached the council regarding the large number of unwanted kittens, over 200 a year, that she is asked to shelter. Christinah Jamieson offered testimony. She stressed that cat owners should be held to the same legal requirements as dog owners, meaning that cats should be licensed, spayed or neutered, and vaccinated the same as dogs. The council agreed with her suggestion and will amend the dog ordinance to include cats. A first reading of the new proposed ordinance will be heard at the council's next meeting on Jan. 26.

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WEEKLY FARE SALES



FREIGHT FOR LESS

KSTK news director tries Alaska after Michigan and Colorado

By MARK C. ROBINSON
Sentinel reporter

A year and a half ago, Colette Czarnecki, the new news director at public radio KSTK, had been a trainee in NPR's Next Gen Radio, a five-day, audio-focused journalism project which finds, coaches and trains journalists for public media. Her mentor on the project advised her to try looking for jobs in Alaska.

As Czarnecki checked out public radio jobs in places like Petersburg, Ketchikan and finally Wrangell, she said, "The people that interviewed me, they kept on contacting me and constantly told me, 'Hey, this station is hiring. You should apply.' ... It just felt really supportive of a network, and I don't think I've actually experienced that elsewhere."

Czarnecki's first day of work at the radio station was Nov. 20, the day of the deadly landslide, which put her to work on the town's biggest story in years. Almost two months later, she says she's learning a lot on the job. "I really like it there. It feels very supportive."

Accompanying her on the long journey here, including a car ride from Colorado, then ferry ride from Bellingham, Washington, was her 8-year-old dog Alice, who she earlier described in a KSTK interview as "a beagle-pit bull-lab mix."

"She's my baby," Czarnecki said. "We're together in this for the long haul."

Making the switch from print and longer forms of audio journalism, Czarnecki has had to adjust to the unique nature of being an on-air reporter writing for radio. "There's live broadcasting, I'm learning that," she said. "From my experience, everything needs to be more condensed. Whereas podcasts can be (at least)



PHOTO BY MARK C. ROBINSON/WRANGELL SENTINEL

Colette Czarnecki gets ready for another broadcast day as news director at KSTK.

an hour long, but with radio, it ideally would be like between three and five minutes for a story."

Originally from southeast Michigan just outside of Detroit, Czarnecki said she later relocated to that city "after a little moving around," and added that having spent about 13 years there provided her with a sense of community. While there, she earned a bachelor's degree in environ-

mental science and urban studies from Wayne State University.

When Czarnecki was still living in Detroit, she worked on a variety of multimedia projects, which included making films using old-school methods, with 16mm footage. "That can get expensive," she said.

One of her main projects was what she called "documentary shadow-puppet

shows."

"I helped my friends with their shows. I also created my own show. I got a grant for that, and that was a lot of work, under the mentorship of a professional Russian puppeteer," she said with a laugh. "So that was before I actually started doing journalism."

Once Czarnecki determined her current career path, she attended grad school in 2020 at the University of Colorado where she got a master's degree in journalism. "What I wanted to do was audio, once I realized this is what I want to do," she said. "So I created audio packages. I've also created short documentaries, and then of course print."

Before arriving in town, Czarnecki had been working at The Journal newspaper, based in the Four Corners region, the only spot in the United States where four states (Arizona, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico) come together.

Coming from Colorado, she likes living in Wrangell, but as she got here in mid-November, she has so far only experienced the town in winter. "I don't know what it's like in other seasons."

She said she doesn't mind the extended periods of gray, rainy days, although she did enjoy seeing the sun on the first Saturday in January. She also admitted that the long winter nights here sometimes make it difficult for her to get out of bed in the morning, but she has found at least one way to help her compensate. "I do have a therapy light at home."

Czarnecki said that she has committed to working at KSTK for at least a year. As for what the future holds, "All I can say is, I'll see what happens next."

Salvation Army food pantry better stocked than usual after holidays

By CHARLEY SUTHERLAND
For the Wrangell Sentinel

Typically, at this time of year, The Salvation Army food pantry, the only regular food pantry in Wrangell, is running low on items coming out of the holiday crush.

Last year, the food pantry gave out 130 baskets for Thanksgiving and 200 for Christmas. Often, that leaves the pantry with fewer offerings for people in need immediately after the holidays. This year is different.

Capt. Chase Tomberlin-Green explained The Salvation Army received loads of donations following November's landslide and they are still well stocked.

Donations came from neighbors and members of the

Wrangell community. In addition, The Salvation Army received a large donation from the Southeast Alaska Food Bank in Juneau, according to Tomberlin-Green.

Thanks to this large donation from out of town, the pantry is well equipped at a time of year when it is typically running low.

Tomberlin-Green is feeling grateful for that donation, even though he understands the circumstances behind it.

"It's a little scary, without that donation we wouldn't be so plentiful now," he said.

Even though the pantry is currently well stocked, he strongly emphasized the continued need for donations.

Tomberlin-Green said he's noticing the need for nutritious

food and hygiene products perhaps more than ever in Wrangell due to the rising cost of living.

People have come to the food bank saying they've cut back on their eating because they simply cannot afford groceries or that their baby has run out of diapers and they don't have money to buy more, the captain said.

That's where the church comes in.

"The mission of The Salvation Army is to meet human needs without discrimination. We're here to love others with everything we've got," Tomberlin-Green said.

Specifically, the pantry needs razors, diapers, wipes, women's hygiene products and shampoo, as well as foods like rice, cereals, oatmeal, pan-

cake mixes, canned goods and soy sauce.

Anyone can drop off donations from Monday to Friday between 8:30 a.m. and 3 p.m. at 611 Zimovia Highway.

The Salvation Army has open-distribution hours from

10 a.m. to 2 p.m. every Tuesday, when anyone can come pick up items from the pantry.

Tomberlin-Green said people in need who cannot come by during the open hours can call 907-874-3753 and they'll find a way to help.

King salmon

Continued from page 1

could potentially curtail commercial fishing for king salmon and affect sport and subsistence fishing as well. There could also be implications for logging and mining, which are described in the petition as threats to critical salmon habitats, she said.

The conservancy has already drawn intense criticism from Southeast Alaska troll fishermen and some Alaska-based conservation groups for a federal lawsuit it filed in 2020. The lawsuit, which had threatened last summer's Southeast troll fishery for kings, is still playing out on appeal. It challenged a key federal authorization that is needed for state managers to open the troll chinook harvest each year.

The conservancy says the lawsuit aims to protect an endangered population of orca whales near Puget Sound that feed on chinook. But the Alaska trollers and their allies say it could force an economically devastating closure of their fishery.

The conservancy's petition will start what could be a lengthy review process.

The National Marine Fisheries Service has 90 days to decide whether or not to accept the petition, which would happen if it determines that the conservancy's request presents "substantial information indicating that the petitioned action may be warranted."

If it accepts the petition, the service will begin a comprehensive review of the Alaska king salmon's status, analyzing the "best available scientific and commercial information" on the species' biology, population trends and threats.

Within a year, the agency will decide whether that review supports listing the salmon as threatened or endangered, and if so, it will publish a proposed rule and request for public comments before making a final decision, typically within another year.

This article was originally published in the Northern Journal, a newsletter from Alaska journalist Nathaniel Herz. The Anchorage Daily News contributed to this report.

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FROM THE PUBLISHER

Trump excels at something — being mean

BY LARRY PERSILY
Publisher

Children are taught not to make fun of others, tease them or be mean. Parents, teachers, counselors, church leaders and community mentors such as Girl Scout and Little League volunteers work hard to explain why it's hurtful to make fun of someone who is different.

Most seem to get the message. But not all. Bullying and shaming continues to be a problem, made worse by social media which treats so many things as a joke or an amusing video, regardless of how it may hurt someone.

And rather than set a good example, Donald Trump makes it worse — and he seems proud of it. He stands and waits for the applause line when he is rude, when he resorts to name-calling, when he makes fun of people's appearance or mannerisms.

Trump clearly missed school — and church — on the days they taught kids not to be mean to each other. Actually, he probably missed a lot of lessons of life as he went about making money, building hotels and his ego, and enjoying fame and fortune — except those times he declared bankruptcy.

But it's his offensive behavior, the mocking and belittling of his opponents that sets a new low for American politics.

At a campaign event in Iowa on Jan. 5, Trump lit into President Joe Biden over the economy, immigration and foreign policy. Fair enough in politics. That's what a campaign should be about, telling voters your policies and

why they are better than your opponent's. But then Trump stepped deep into the political mud and made fun of Biden's childhood speaking impediment.

"Did you see him? He was stuttering through the whole thing," Trump said to a laughing crowd in Sioux Center, Iowa. "He's saying I'm a threat to democracy. ... He's a threat to d-d-democracy," Trump performed in a fake stutter. "(Biden) couldn't read the word."

Fact is, that's not true. Tapes show that Biden said the word "democracy" 29 times in his own speech earlier that day, never stuttering over any of the four syllables. Trump made up the facts to make fun of stuttering as a punchline.

Worse than lying is that an adult, a former president, a man who proclaims he is smart and compassionate, would stand in front of a crowd, in front of cameras and microphones and go for laughs at someone else's expense. He's no better than the schoolyard bully who picks on the small kid, the overweight kid, the one with bad eyesight, a limp or other physical impairment.

Trump has labeled his political enemies, judges, prosecutors and anyone else he does not like as crazy, birdbrain, deranged, wacky, ugly, a lunatic, a radical, racist and even vermin. It's as if he owns a thesaurus that has nothing but insulting words.

He tosses out insults and makes fun of people as easily as baseball fans scream at the umpires. The difference being, baseball is a game. Leading the country is serious, and Trump is seriously mean.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Artificial is OK to put in our hair, but not our heads

Artificial intelligence doesn't seem natural to me. How can it be intelligent if it's artificial?

Back when I went to school in the 1950s, our intelligence was spurred on by a teacher standing in front of a classroom. We attended each day from 8 in the morning until noon and then back at 1 until 4:30 p.m. As each day passed, our intelligence increased.

The goal, of course, was for us to go through our elementary, middle and high school with some real intelligence in our brains at the end of it. Reading, writing and arithmetic were our basic courses. We also had health, physical fitness and, of course, my favorite, recess.

To this day I can still add up figures in my head without the use of a calculator. I can also make change with real money. I have to admit it is kind of hard at times slipping that piece of plastic into that machine and answering all of the questions. Maybe that's where artificial intelligence could be of service to me. But here we are on a day-to-day basis struggling with some of these newfangled ideas.

Don't get me wrong, I am all about progress and developing

new techniques, but I think we've gone one step too far with artificial intelligence. I still prefer real intelligence and leaving the artificial stuff in hair shampoo.

Don McConachie

Alaskans have more needs than just the dividend

The 2024 Alaska legislative session started Tuesday, Jan. 16. My main committee assignment will be to serve for the eighth year on the House Finance Committee, which is responsible for moving the operating and capital budgets to the full House for approval. The challenge we always face is allocating limited revenue to meet the nearly limitless funding requests, including the annual Permanent Fund dividend.

We will begin our work this session with the spending plan submitted by Gov. Mike Dunleavy, which includes a deficit of \$987 million and paying out a \$3,400 dividend. While receiving that size of a PFD would be appreciated by everyone, including myself, the proposed deficit spending poses problems and threatens future dividend payments.

Additionally, allocating declining revenue to the PFD makes it difficult to comply with our constitutional mandate to

"adequately" fund public education and provide for public safety. The base student allocation funding formula for our public schools has not been meaningfully increased since 2012, hindering the education of our future Alaska workforce.

Another pressing issue is the need for investment in our infrastructure, primarily through the need for a more robust capital budget.

And there is also a real need for increased funding for most state agencies, particularly the SNAP benefits backlog, Department of Transportation, Alaska Marine Highway System and more. Large numbers of job vacancies currently exist in almost every state agency, having a negative impact on their ability to provide needed goods and services in support of the statewide economy and to individual households.

These important issues will be very difficult to adequately address as begin the 2024 session facing a proposed budget with a \$1 billion deficit.

Please, do not hesitate to contact me at Rep.Daniel.Ortiz@akleg.gov or at 907-617-5116 if you would like to provide input as to where you stand on these important questions facing the Legislature.

Rep. Dan Ortiz

EDITORIAL

Ranked-choice rankles the losers

It's becoming an increasingly common tactic for election losers to blame anyone but themselves.

In Alaska, that means several of the recent losers and their supporters blame their defeat on ranked-choice voting, which took effect for the 2022 elections after the public voted in favor of the change in 2020.

But rather learn from their losses and put up candidates who appeal to a broader range of voters, which is the smart way to win elections, the losers want to deny all Alaskans the ability to select from the best of everyone on the ballot, not just those screened for the election by a closed political party system.

And now, in 2024, Alaskans may have to decide again whether ranked-choice voting is better than political party primaries to select the general election finalists. It looks like opponents of the voting system have turned in enough petition signatures to put the question on the 2024 statewide ballot, asking voters to repeal their 2020 decision.

The advocates argue that ranked-choice voting is confusing. Many call it corrupt — a favorite word when someone does not like the results. They have no proof of corruption or misdeeds, but that doesn't seem to stop anyone these days. The group pushing the repeal vote has adopted the slogan: "Our Mission is to Return Alaskan Elections to Alaskans."

Yet, in fact, their aim is to take elections away from Alaskans and return it to political parties, the Republican party in particular.

Alaska Republicans used to keep their primary elections closed to anyone registered with another party. The state, by the way, paid to conduct those primaries.

The closed primaries produced some pretty hard-core conservative candidates who appealed to the party's base but not many other voters. It heightened divisive politics. It pushed away Republican candidates who were willing to work for all Alaskans, not just those endorsed by the party.

Ranked-choice voting is designed to tone down partisanship by putting all candidates of all parties into one primary with the top four advancing to the general election, where voters can rank the four in order of preference. The candidate with the most support from the most voters wins.

Nothing evil or corrupt about that, just a better way of electing people who put the state and its residents ahead of party loyalty. It's also a better way to reflect Alaskans' independence — almost 60% of registered voters in the state are listed as nonpartisan or independent.

Ranked-choice voting gives those 60%, and everyone else, a better shot at voting for their preferred candidates. There is no reason to change something as fair as that.

- Wrangell Sentinel

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Minimum wage

Continued from page 1

Jan. 9 news conference at the Alaska AFL-CIO office in Anchorage.

To qualify for the November ballot, there must be at least 26,705 signatures of registered voters — equivalent to 10% of the total who voted in the last statewide general election — with signers meeting legal requirements for geographic diversity.

If the signatures are verified, this would be the third time in 22 years that a minimum wage increase will have qualified for the statewide ballot. Voters in 2014 approved a ballot initiative that established a stepped increase in the minimum wage to its current rate. A petition drive more than 10 years earlier resulted in enough signatures to get the measure on the ballot, but the Legislature in 2002 passed a similar bill, making the initiative moot.

“Hopefully, the third time’s the charm. Frankly we didn’t go high enough the last time,” Flanagan said at the news conference.

The 2014 initiative passed with nearly 70% of the vote, and Flanagan said he believes support for the current initiative remains similarly high.

Joelle Hall, president of the Alaska AFL-CIO and another leader of the campaign, said the initiative campaign is a necessity for this issue.

“This is the only way the minimum wage gets raised in this state,” she said at the news conference.

An increase in the minimum wage would affect more than those at the lowest pay levels, Hall said. She cited as an example the Teamster-represented school bus drivers who are entitled, by contract, to starting pay of twice the minimum wage. “This will help us attract and keep those bus drivers,” she said. “There’s lots of ways this reaches a lot of the people maybe who aren’t necessarily making \$14 an hour right now. It has a big ripple effect.”

Salaried employees who do not get overtime pay, such as managers at fast-food restaurants, will

also benefit because they are entitled to pay that is equivalent to at least twice the minimum wage, Flanagan added.

The initiative has other worker-friendly elements aside from the pay increase. It would mandate paid sick leave and would prevent workers from being compelled to attend or listen to employer meetings or messages about politics or religion.

The importance of paid sick leave was highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, initiative supporters said. Without it, sick employees may be exposing coworkers or, especially in the food industry, customers, they said.

For initiative sponsors, one task in coming months will be preventing what they characterized as legislative interference.

In 2003, the year after lawmakers passed a nearly identical bill, causing the minimum wage initiative to be dropped from the ballot, the Legislature repealed important provisions of its own bill: an inflation adjuster that would have increased pay over the years and a requirement that Alaska’s minimum wage be at least \$1 above the federal minimum.

“This was an act of cynicism breathtaking even for the Legislature” Flanagan said.

Some business groups opposed previous efforts, and that opposition may resurface this year.

The Alaska Chamber has not yet taken a position on the ballot initiative, said Kati Capozzi, the organization’s president.

The issue is to be discussed at an upcoming board meeting, Capozzi said. The chamber is still evaluating the initiative and trying to sort out “unintended consequences and potential pitfalls,” especially for small businesses and certain sectors like the seafood and tourism industries, she said.

The Alaska Beacon is an independent, donor-funded news organization. Alaskabeacon.com.

Legislative session preview

Continued from page 1

serves. The dividend is paid from the state general fund, the same as schools and most other public services. The general fund gets the vast majority of its money from Permanent Fund earnings and oil taxes and royalties.

The governor in 2021 proposed a constitutional amendment for a new dividend formula, which would have resulted in a payout of almost \$2,800 per person last year. Legislators did not act on the proposal.

The Legislature was scheduled to gavel back to work on Tuesday, Jan. 16, for a session limited by the constitution to no more than 121 days.

Ortiz had good news for the assembly regarding the governor’s budget proposal for a \$5 million state grant to help with stabilization work at Wrangell’s water reservoir earthen dams. “It’s going to happen,” he said of legislative approval of that portion Dunleavy’s budget that includes the Wrangell money.

Mayor Patty Gilbert asked the representative if there was similar good news about Wrangell’s request for \$6.5 million in state grant funds to pair with the community’s \$3.5 million bond issue approved by voters in 2022 for repairs to all three school buildings in town.

Wrangell is No. 16 on the Alaska Department of Education’s Major Maintenance Grant Fund list for the next fiscal year, too far down to receive funding based on past appropriations to cover the list. Though legislators have tried to fund more of the projects on the list, the governor has used his veto power to reduce or eliminate legislative funding the past three years.

“Deferred maintenance across the state for our schools is a growing number,” Ortiz said.

“If I had to bet, I think it’s going to happen,” he said of sufficient state funding this year to reach Wrangell’s position on the list.

But that likely will depend on oil prices and state revenues, the size of the dividend and legislative negotiations with the governor over school funding.

Harbor project

Continued from page 1

\$79,453 for the contract with PND Engineers.

“PND has committed to our short timeline to complete the condition assessments, cost estimates and conceptual drawings which will be used to strengthen

our upcoming RAISE grant application,” Al-Haddad reported.

As part of assembling the grant application, the borough has scheduled a public meeting for 6 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 31, at City Hall to gather public comments on the project. Concep-

tual drawings of the rebuild will be available at the session. Borough and PND staff will be at the meeting to answer questions.

The borough selected PND because the firm has done a lot of design and engineering work

on Wrangell harbor projects, Villarma told the assembly on Jan. 9. “It is really important” that the borough submit a thorough application by the deadline, and no other firm could prepare the information as quickly as PND, he said.

The community should know by June if it is selected for the RAISE grant. If it is unsuccessful, Villarma said, the borough will continue looking for other state and federal sources of money for the project.



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New owner wants to expand Wrangell seafood sales

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

A Pacific Northwest seafood business owner, whose family has been active in commercial fishing in Alaska since 1981, plans to buy and expand the operations of Fathom Seafoods in Wrangell.

Peninsula Seafoods has applied to the borough for transfer of the lease on a small dockside parcel at the Marine Service Center. The port commission has recommended approval of the transfer, sending the issue to the borough assembly.

As soon as the assembly signs off on the transfer, which could come at its Jan. 23 meeting, Jeff Grannum, general manager of Peninsula Seafoods, said he will take over the business.

Grannum, who lives in Portland, bought Peninsula Seafoods about two years ago. The marketing company has its administrative offices in Port Angeles, Washington.

He plans to continue buying crab, which has been Fathom Seafood's mainstay, and expand the Wrangell operation into halibut, shrimp and salmon. The plant has a small blast freezer, but the main focus will be on buying, icing, packing and shipping fresh seafood to buyers.

Grannum said he is working with a custom processor in the Seattle area that could freeze Peninsula Seafoods' product if needed to meet market demand.

The Wrangell plant also has tanks to hold live crab.

"We came to Wrangell originally looking for crab," said Solomon Fowler, of Fathom Seafood, which bought the waterfront operation in 2021 from Steve Thomassen, who worked under the name Crab Alaska.

Fathom, with facilities in Oregon and Washington state, isn't leaving Wrangell entirely. Fowler said he plans to buy Wrangell crab from Peninsula Seafoods.

"I'm going to sell as much as I can," Grannum said in an interview Jan. 9. "Dungies are a core for us," he said of the popular Dungeness crab. He also plans to buy and market "as much halibut as we possibly can."

He expects to start moving product in mid-February, when the golden king crab season opens, moving into other species as their seasons open for commercial harvest. "Our focus is going to be buying 'species by calendar.'"

The state has significantly increased this year's harvest guideline for golden

king crab in Frederick Sound, north of Petersburg.

After the crab season, Peninsula will turn to longliners and trollers for halibut and then salmon. "We want to build our base of longliners, particularly for halibut," Grannum said.

The operation plans to serve the fleet with bait and ice, according to its lease transfer request to the borough.

Grannum explained he wants to work with fishermen, figuring out what they have coming into the dock and selling the catch ahead for delivery to customers. "I want to focus on direct supply from fishermen."

Branding is part of it, too, he said. "I'm definitely planning to send out branded seafood cartons," printed with the company name and "Wrangell Seafood."

"Alaska Air Cargo is our freight route for everything," he said of moving product to market, though perhaps, in time, he may expand into putting iced, fresh seafood on the southbound state ferry on Monday for delivery in Bellingham, Washington, two days later.

"To be determined," is how he describes the truck and ferry option.

Peninsula Seafoods will join Seattle-

based Trident Seafoods and Sea Level Seafood, owned by Oregon-based Pacific Seafood, as Wrangell's largest buyers and sellers.

Trident reopened its Wrangell plant last summer after a three-year closure. The company said in December it intends to operate the facility this year, though it is looking to sell its plants in Petersburg and Ketchikan as it adapts to a changing market.

Trident froze headed-and-gutted pinks and chums in Wrangell last year.

Grannum said he would like to expand Peninsula Seafoods into troll salmon but is unsure of a timeline.

He comes from a fishing family, which has run a setnet site on the Kenai Peninsula since 1981. He later worked at Pacific Seafood in Wrangell, working alongside Verne and Dustin Phillips.

"Dustin is a key partner in all this," Grannum said of his co-worker, who will be Peninsula Seafoods' fleet manager in Wrangell.

The company is planning to employ a minimum of three people at the facility, doubling or tripling that number as needed when seafood is coming in for packing and shipping.

Resident florist moves business to brick-and-mortar shop

By MARK C. ROBINSON
Sentinel reporter

Since Artha DeRuyter arrived in town three years ago with her husband, clinical psychologist and current school board member John DeRuyter, she has provided flowers and floral arrangements for residents from their floating home in the harbor, in addition to selling her wares at other venues like the monthly community market at the Nolan Center, prompting her to name her blooming business OnTheWater Floral.

Originally hailing from Fairbanks, DeRuyter has been involved with flowers, whether as a pastime, a side gig or her main job, for over 40 years.

"Flowers are just beautiful," she said, adding that her

favorites are peonies.

Now, at the old R&M Engineering building on Zimovia Highway, she is in the middle of renovations to turn the place into a permanent home as well as a location for her flower shop, expecting that it will be ready for business on Feb. 1, with plans for a grand opening on Valentine's Day, Feb. 14.

"I asked myself ... 'What am I doing?' Because we are semi-retired," she said with a laugh. "It's not like I don't have enough to do."

Even before opening day, DeRuyter continues to stay busy. "I've already had quite a few people come in," she said. "I'm amazed at how much business I do through Facebook."

Moving through the build-

ing with her grown son's beagle Brodey in tow, she entered a workroom that had concrete flooring and a commercial-grade sink, with assorted flower arrangements and wreaths in various spots. "This worked out perfect. I mean, this room is perfect for a flower shop!"

While she doesn't yet have a cooler to store flowers, she noted that one of the bathrooms has no heat. "So it makes it the current cooler," she said, laughing. "I've got the flowers in the bathroom."

There had been a flower shop in town but the owner closed the business, so DeRuyter bought most of the stock. "In the back of my mind, I've always been wanting to open a shop again," she said. "I had a shop in Fair-

banks for three years."

Living in Wrangell for the past three years is reminiscent of her childhood in her hometown. "Wrangell reminds me of old Fairbanks from when I was growing up," she said. "Fairbanks was pretty small. Everybody knew everybody, you know, and what I really like about here is ... if it's a beautiful day or something, you just close up your business and go fishing. ... You just post it on Facebook, like 'Oh, sorry, guys, we're not going to be here today.' And everybody takes it in stride."

DeRuyter plans to be open only from mid-September to Mother's Day in May. "We're going to be taking off in the boat in the summer," she said, pointing out that there is a greenhouse at Oceanview Gardens that will be open. "They grow the most gorgeous garden flowers in the summertime," she said. "Their flowers

are just fabulous, so let them take over the flower business in the summer."

Laura Ballou, of Oceanview Gardens, said she and her husband Dwane will be selling flowers directly starting on Valentine's Day - with tulips the only ones available that early in the season - until October.

In addition to her work as a florist, DeRuyter has also assisted Joan Sargent with creating costumes at the Nolan Center for the stage productions "Sound of Music," "Annie" and "Cinderella."

Her favorite part of her job as a florist is the enjoyment that her floral arrangements bring to people. "Flowers generally bring joy and happiness to people," she said. "I've worked in all situations, you know, with funerals, weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, whatever. Generally, flowers make people happy."

Assembly hikes rates for cruise ships that lighter their passengers to shore

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

Cruise ship operators that lighter their passengers to shore will pay higher port fees starting this summer in Wrangell.

The borough assembly unanimously approved the new rate structure Jan. 9, following a port commission recommendation.

The rates had been set at 40% of the cost of tying up to the dock, with the new fee structure raising that to 60%. The increase in lightering fees is intended to encourage more ships to tie up at the dock rather than anchor offshore, Interim Borough Manager Mason Villarma told the assembly.

Wrangell should be competitive in its rates but not too low, said Assembly Member Bob Dalrymple. "I always want us to be a bargain" to help attract ships and their passengers to town.

About 20 of the almost 50 stops by cruise ships with 200 berths or more in Wrangell last summer lightered their passengers to shore.

"Regionally, we're low compared to most of them," Harbormaster Steve Miller told the assembly of how Wrangell's fees compare to other Southeast communities.

"In the past, Wrangell has adopted a strategy

of keeping port rates low in order to attract businesses and stimulate economic growth," Miller said in a written report to the assembly.

"This approach has successfully brought in a significant amount of business to the ports and harbor area, contributing to the overall development of Wrangell," he said.

"As the years have passed, the maintenance costs associated with maintaining and upgrading the ports and harbor infrastructure have skyrocketed. The low port rates, while beneficial in attracting businesses, have not generated enough revenue to cover these rising costs," Miller said in his report.

Lightering rates as based on the size of the vessel. For a 964-foot-long cruise ship, the new rate will be \$14,364.

The assembly action also changed the borough's fee for security personnel on the dock from \$30 an hour to \$600 for each cruise ship stop.

"Moving the security fee to a flat rate will help streamline the billing process and help cover costs associated with utilizing harbor personnel to cover this position when we have no security personnel available," the harbormaster said in his report.

Borough adopts \$300 fine to combat illegal tree cutting

By SENTINEL STAFF

The borough assembly on Jan. 9 unanimously adopted an ordinance to institute a \$300 fine for illegally cutting down trees on borough land.

No one from the public spoke on the ordinance at the public hearing held before the assembly vote.

In addition to the ordinance setting the amount of the fine, the assembly also unanimously approved an ordinance adding trespass to the borough code, which prohibits "cutting down, injury or removal of trees or timber from borough property without written permission."

Borough officials drafted the ordinances to counter people driving out the Spur Road and illegally cutting down trees on borough land and hauling away the logs, likely for firewood, said Wrangell Police Chief Tom Radke earlier this month.

In some cases, the "loggers" have damaged drainage ditches, the highway surface and guardrail, the chief said.

"It's been going on for a while," Radke said.

The trespass addition to municipal law also applies to digging or taking stone, rock or earth from borough property without written permission.

Outer Coast educational program pulls in former Wrangell residents

By MARK C. ROBINSON
Sentinel reporter

When Lillian “Jing” O’Brien graduated from Wrangell High School in 2020, COVID-19 had taken over the nation and she had enrolled in Loyola University in Chicago with tentative plans to study pre-law and perhaps later corporate law. “I was fully planning to go, but then last minute around July, they sent out a message saying, unfortunately, due to the COVID restrictions, they were going to close down campus and move classes online.”

That unexpected complication pushed O’Brien to explore different options, which led her to a relatively new program in Sitka. “I decided Outer Coast would be a much more fulfilling academic experience for me at the time,” she said.

Outer Coast’s executive director, Bryden Sweeney-Taylor, said it’s been operating educational programs since 2018. “Initially, a summer seminar for high school students to earn college credit, engage in the community and govern their own student body,” he said, “and then a postsecondary program, the Outer Coast Year, starting in 2020 for high school graduates where students can come for a semester or for a full year and earn college credit, embed themselves in local organizations, nonprofits, travel organizations, and government entities in Sitka.”

And now staff and faculty are working toward turning it into a two-year liberal arts college.

The campus is located on the former campus of Sheldon Jackson College and its predecessor, the Sitka Industrial Training School. After Sheldon Jackson closed in 2007, the campus was turned over to the nonprofit Alaska Arts Southeast, which primarily uses the property for over a thousand middle school and high school students who attend the Sitka Fine Arts Camp during the summer.



Wrangell class of 2020 graduate Lillian “Jing” O’Brien credits the Sitka-based college program Outer Coast with changing the direction of her life.

“But during the academic year, the campus was largely dormant for those first several years once the Fine Arts Camp took on ownership,” Sweeney-Taylor said. “That was the inspiration for Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins, our local representative for a decade in the state Legislature, to say, ‘How can we bring higher education back to this campus?’ and so that was really the jumping off point for Outer Coast.”

According to Sweeney-Taylor, Deep Springs College, a two-year liberal arts institution in the high desert of eastern California (and Sweeney-Taylor’s alma mater) served as a template. “Jonathan knew a bunch of folks who’d been at Deep Springs from his college career, and said, ‘Maybe this is a model that we can bring to Sitka.’”

Since the Sitka Industrial Training School, the previous institution on the

“It really did change the trajectory of my life, because I ended up in a totally new college, and a totally new place, on a totally new path.”

— LILLIAN “JING” O’BRIEN

site, had been part of the Indian boarding school movement, which critics say tried to destroy Native languages and cultures in Alaska, the founders and staff of Outer Coast felt a responsibility to commemorate this history and stand as a model of education that now honors Indigenous cultures and languages.

In September 2022, Outer Coast students and faculty visited Wrangell to serve as volunteers for Sharing Our Knowledge, a regional conference of Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian tribes and clans. The college program also offers free, online Alaska Native language courses for learners across the state and beyond.

Sweeney-Taylor touched on the three main pillars of Outer Coast’s curriculum: academics, service and labor, and self-governance.

Service and labor tasks students to maintain partnerships with community organizations and carry out much of the labor, such as cooking and cleaning, to handle Outer Coast’s day-to-day operations.

For the final pillar, self-governance, students work with staff and faculty to govern their community, which includes legislating academic and student life policies, as well as shaping academic course offerings.

Moving toward their goal of becoming a fully accredited two-year college, Sweeney-Taylor said they are collaborating with the University of Alaska Southeast and the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities with plans to welcome their first degree-seeking college students in August 2024, planning for the first graduates in spring 2026.

Outer Coast outreach recruitment lead and former Wrangell resident Reyn Hutten first heard of Outer Coast in 2019 from someone at Dartmouth College, where she was a student. “I’ve really been a strong believer in experiential education,” she said. “I’ve always kept my eye on Outer Coast as a place that’s doing important work. I’ve been aware of it and recommend it to students.”

Hutten said students are actively engaged, such as an ecology study of a Sitka trail and a Tlingit folk tales storytelling event with Sitka public radio KCAW.

Since joining the staff in November, Hutten’s duties include regularly meeting with staff, spending time with Outer Coast students who may be struggling and traveling to different schools across the state. “I feel that I get a whole lot out of it. I’ve only been here a couple of months, but as soon as I got there, I felt I was embraced as a whole person,” she said.

Hutten also thinks her experience as a Southeast resident is an asset to the program. “I’m already fairly connected to various places of learning in Southeast Alaska.”

For O’Brien, the yearlong program at Outer Coast was transformative. “It really did change the trajectory of my life, because I ended up in a totally new college, and a totally new place, on a totally new path.”

She is now enrolled in Pomona College, a small liberal arts college in Claremont, California, studying computer science and politics.

Juneau schools discover \$9.5 million deficit; 10% of total budget

By SEAN MAGUIRE
Anchorage Daily News

Juneau school administrators are facing a severe budget shortfall partly related to flat state funding and declining enrollment. But much of the crisis comes from accounting errors that “drastically” under-

counted staffing costs.

The city’s school board learned Jan. 9 that the district is projected to be \$7.6 million in deficit for the current fiscal year and carrying over a \$1.9 million shortfall from the prior fiscal year. The combined \$9.5 million deficit equates to roughly 10% of the district’s total budget, and it’s expected to keep ballooning.

Lisa Pearce, Juneau schools’ new finance consultant, was hired temporarily last month by the district on a \$50,000 contract to review the current year’s budget and help the board write the next budget. She previously worked in a similar position at Fairbanks North Star Borough School District.

Juneau’s former administrative services director, Cassee Olin, resigned last month after a November budget audit found the district was \$7 million in deficit, the Juneau Empire reported in December.

After another budget review in recent weeks, Pearce said staffing costs had been understated by \$5 million. Retirement costs were “mischaracterized” as revenues instead of expenditures and undercounted by \$1.5 million, she said.

Pearce noted other accounting errors. The district’s budget did not include funding for the superintendent’s salary and benefits at \$252,000. Some special education grants were estimated to be \$300,000 when the actual cost has been over \$1.8 million for the year to date — similar to figures from prior years, she said.

Enrollment was also expected to be 83 students below earlier projections, which was expected to cause \$870,000 less in funding from the state, she said.

Some of Juneau’s school funding challenges have been seen across Alaska. Other districts have reported strained finances from the end of COVID-19 relief, declining enrollment and years of flat state

funding.

The Anchorage School District recently projected a \$98 million deficit and was expected to have 1,279 fewer students this year. Administrators are examining whether to end programs for gifted students, increase student-teacher ratios and reduce summer school offerings — among other reductions.

KTFV-TV reported that Fairbanks school officials are facing a record \$28 million projected deficit; the Peninsula Clarion reported the Kenai Peninsula School District has a roughly \$13 million deficit and 148 fewer students.

The Wrangell school district is in its last year of federal pandemic relief funding and faces tough financial choices for the 2024-2025 school year budget, which the school board will put together over the next couple of months.

Some of Juneau’s other financial challenges — like the accounting errors — are more localized. David Noon, a school board member, said he was “incandescent with rage” about the errors and questioned how they weren’t noticed. School Board President Deedie Sorensen said she was “extraordinarily upset” about the district’s budget situation.

Administrators have few options. Pearce urged board members to look forward, but she didn’t think it was mathematically possible to resolve the structural deficit in one year.

Juneau Superintendent Frank Hauser, who was appointed in April after the current budget was written, said 90% of the district’s budget goes to salaries, and 90% of those costs go to classroom teachers. Many of the budget expenses — like those for retirement benefits — are statutorily or constitutionally required and cannot be cut.

Will Muldoon, who chairs the Juneau school board’s finance committee, said Juneau’s budget crisis is “unprecedented.” He said administrators can cut programs, fire staff or close schools — but no combination of cuts could reasonably close the deficit before July.

“We’re insolvent right now,” Muldoon said. “We cannot pay our bills.”

Board member Emil Mackey urged making deep cuts but — saying nobody wants to hear it — that filing for bankruptcy may end up being the best option for Juneau School District.

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State sets much larger harvest guideline for SE golden king crab

BY OLIVIA ROSE
Petersburg Pilot

The commercial tanner crab and golden king crab season in Southeast opens at noon Feb 17.

A change this year will require golden king crab fisher-

men to call in to the Department of Fish and Game every day to report which management area they plan to fish, to help fisheries staff better anticipate and manage the harvest.

The department announced the golden king crab guideline

harvest level in southern Southeast, Registration Area A, at 272,500 pounds, with specific areas seeing notable changes. The number is almost three times the size of last year's guideline harvest, with most of the increase in a single portion of the region.

The increase is the result of meetings between the fishing industry and state fisheries management. Last year, golden king crab abundance in the East Central portion of Area A, around Kupreanof and Mitkof islands, and the waters west of Zarembo Island, was dramatically underestimated. The 2023 numbers suggested that the fishery could support a much larger harvest.

The department has set the guideline harvest level for the East Central portion at 150,000 pounds, more than 10 times

the 2023 pre-season number.

A funding cut years ago ended the state's golden king crab onboard observer program, where observers used to go out with fishermen, sew up the escape rings of pots — which allow immature and female crabs to escape from the pot and not be caught in the harvest — and measure how many juveniles got caught when the pot was hauled back in.

The program helped survey, measure and check stock health. Now, two projects are in progress to provide improved data.

Fishermen have reported seeing juveniles, but without an official survey the area count is unclear. The objective of one new project is to get a better idea of where the juvenile grounds are by allowing up to five volunteer vessels to

sew up the escape rings of five golden king crab pots, count how many male and female juveniles they catch, and record that data in a logbook.

The other project will take place after an area is closed, when one vessel sets 10 sewn-closed pots in high-density juvenile golden king crab areas, then later returns with a Department of Fish and Game employee, or observer, to retrieve the pots and measure the crab to get a better idea of the shellfish size in that area.

Adam Messmer, the department's lead shellfish biologist in Southeast, said the new monitoring programs are in their infancy and would take "multiple years of data to figure out whether that population is going up or down. ... But, like any project, you have to start somewhere."

Searchers find bodies of 2 who died when boat overturned north of Sitka

BY SHANNON HAUGLAND
Sitka Sentinel

Using an unmanned underwater drone to search a boat that had overturned near Chichagof Island, searchers on Jan. 10 located the bodies of two people who were missing after three others were rescued from the Jan. 9 accident.

The three who survived were hoisted from the water within about an hour from the time Sitka Police Department received a digital GPS distress alert at 4:35 p.m. Jan. 9. Police immediately notified Coast Guard Air Station Sitka, and within 14 minutes a rescue helicopter was on the way to the accident site, in waters off the Khaz Peninsula 40 northwest miles north of Sitka.

The flight crew had been preparing for a training flight, so was ready to take off and "pivoted to a rescue mission," said Capt. Vincent Jansen, the commanding officer of the Air Station. The Coast Guard estimated the helicopter arrived on scene at 5:15 p.m. and had rescued the three by 5:50 p.m. The Coast Guard reported seas at 9 feet.

The names of those who survived or died in the accident had not been released by Monday morning, Jan. 15, by the Alaska State Troopers, who are the lead investigators in the accident.

The Coast Guard said conditions were too rough to recover the two bodies on Jan. 11 and 12, with seas at 10 to 12 feet, and winds at 30 to 40 knots at the location of the overturned 26-foot aluminum boat, adrift 22 nautical miles offshore of Chichagof Island.

The crew of a Coast Guard cutter attached a transponder to the capsized boat to keep track of the vessel while the cutter waited out the weather, the Coast Guard said.

Other responders in the case include the Coast Guard Cutter Kukui, a C-130 fixed wing plane from Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak, the Sitka Fire Department and Alaska Wildlife Troopers.

The Sitka Fire Department dive team and troopers arrived at the rescue site on Jan. 10 to deploy an unmanned underwater camera drone to search the cabin of the overturned boat and confirmed that the bodies of the two missing individuals were inside.

Recovery operations will start once on-scene conditions improve.

The name and type of the vessel had not been released as of Jan. 15. The three survivors were brought to Sitka after their rescue and taken to the hospital. Authorities have not released information about their condition.

Jan. 11 earthquake shakes Southeast at 5.9 magnitude

BY SITKA SENTINEL

An earthquake jolted some Sitka residents awake Thursday night, Jan. 11, but no damage was reported and no tsunami occurred.

The Alaska Earthquake Center at Fairbanks said the magnitude 5.9 earthquake occurred at 10:46 p.m. on the seafloor 50 miles south of Sitka. It was felt across Southeast, including Wrangell.

Assistant Sitka Fire Chief David Johnson said the department received a half dozen or so calls about the momentary shaking that people experienced throughout town.

Elisabeth Nadin, communications manager of the earthquake center, said the quake was typical of those on the faults that run along the seabed west of Southeast Alaska.

"It was strike-slip motion, lateral motion — no up and

down — which is the type of motion that happens right there on the Queen Charlotte-Fairweather faults," Nadin said. "That fault separates the Pacific plate to the west, from the North American plate to the east."

The risk of a tsunami from such a quake is low, but not zero, she noted, due to the nature of the tectonic plates in the area.

"There's always the chance that a large enough earthquake could trigger landslides that would displace enough material into the ocean that you have vertical motion of water," the geologist said. "On a strike-slip fault, with just lateral shifting, you're not going to displace large volumes of water upward that then have to fall downward. And that's what a tsunami is, effectively."

FAA steps up oversight of Boeing work; Alaska awaits bringing back 737 Max 9

BY KEN SWEET
Associated Press

Boeing told employees Monday that it plans to increase quality inspections of its 737 Max 9 aircraft, following the failure of an emergency exit door panel on an Alaska Airlines flight Jan. 5.

The inspections come after federal regulators grounded the 737 Max, and after Boeing said it is "clear that we are not where we need to be" on quality assurance and controls.

Alaska Airlines and United Airlines are the only U.S. carriers with the Max 9 aircraft. As of Monday, the Federal Aviation Administration had not said when it would allow the airlines to put the planes back into service.

Alaska had canceled all Boeing 737 MAX 9 flights through Tuesday, Jan. 16, while it waits for further instructions from the FAA. The cancellations have eliminated about 110 to 150 flights per day at the airline — around 20% of its flights. It has 65 Max 9 aircraft in its fleet.

The Max 9 is not used on the flights that come into Wrangell, though travelers are encountering cancellations and delays with connections in Seattle.

It is the latest in a series of troubles for Boeing,

whose reputation as the premier American aircraft manufacturer has been tarnished by a series of manufacturing flaws that have led some airlines to hold off aircraft purchases or go with its European rival, Airbus.

Boeing is bringing in independent inspectors to go over the Max 9 aircraft as needed, Stan Deal, the president of Boeing Commercial Airplanes, in an email to employees.

One of two door plugs on an Alaska Max 9 blew out shortly after the plane took off from Portland, leaving a hole in the plane. The cabin lost pressure and the plane was forced to descend rapidly and return to Portland for an emergency landing. No serious injuries were reported.

Following the incident, the FAA announced it plans an investigation into whether the manufacturer failed to make sure a fuselage panel that blew off was safe and manufactured to meet the design that regulators approved.

The National Transportation Safety Board also is focusing its investigation on those panels, which are installed to fill slots built into the fuselage should an airline configure the Max 9 to carry more passengers and need an additional emergency door.



JUNE 2024 CALENDAR PHOTO - ANAN BEARS



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Researchers say Pacific Northwest salmon hatcheries hurt wild stocks

By ALEX BAUMHARDT
Oregon Capital Chronicle

For much of the past century, fish hatcheries have been built in the Pacific Northwest, across the U.S. and around the world to boost fish populations where wild numbers have gone down.

But an analysis of more than 200 studies on hatcheries programs meant to boost salmonid numbers across the globe — including salmon, trout and whitefish — shows that nearly all have had negative impacts on the wild populations of those fish. Most commonly, hatchery fish reduced the genetic diversity of wild fish, leading to poor health and reproductive outcomes.

The findings weigh into a sensitive topic with a big price tag. In the Northwest, hatcheries are supposed to be a solution to declining wild salmonid numbers, caused in large part by hydroelectric dams, overfishing, irrigation and climate change.

In the Columbia River Basin alone, officials have spent billions of dollars on nearly 200 hatcheries as well as habitat restoration projects during the past 50 years to improve wild numbers, but research shows those programs are having an opposite effect.

The global studies, all undertaken between 1971 and 2021, were analyzed by scientists at the nonprofits Trout Unlimited, based in Virginia, and The Conservation Angler, out of Washington, along with the University of Washington, the University of Montana and the Univer-

sité Laval, in Quebec, Canada. Their analysis was published in July in the journal Fisheries Management and Ecology.

Of the 206 studies the team analyzed, more than 80% revealed hatcheries programs had adverse effects on wild salmonids. Of the 3% of hatcheries globally that were found to benefit wild populations, the majority were stocked with wild fish that were bred and released in small numbers to boost severely depleted wild populations.

John McMillan, science director at The Conservation Angler who worked on the analysis, said the team wanted scientists all over the world who are studying the same fish species to see the impact of hatcheries programs beyond their regions of study. He said despite an overwhelming body of research showing most hatcheries programs hurt wild fish populations, it's often controversial to criticize such programs.

"It's frustrating from a scientific point of view, because you can see what the science suggests, but it's understandable why we've been reluctant to move our position on hatcheries, because of the social implications," he said. "This is one of those things, like climate change, where we have to sit back and think about our relationship with the animal, what it means to us and how much we want to give up so these animals can truly, potentially rebuild themselves."

The Oregon Legislature in 2023 passed a bill which includes \$1 million

for a third-party assessment of hatchery programs in the state, including analysis of their costs and benefits.

Hatcheries programs in the Northwest and globally that release hundreds of thousands of fish each year had the worst effect on wild salmonid populations, according to the analysis.

"When you see really large releases of fish, they tend to swamp out the wild population," McMillan said.

An example is pink salmon released from hatcheries in Alaska.

Pink salmon spend two years in the ocean, feeding before returning to their spawning grounds in rivers. They enter the ocean almost immediately after being released, and feed on vast amounts of microscopic plankton, which are the food for larger plankton that other fish species such as chinook, coho, steelhead and sockeye eat. When hundreds of thousands of pink salmon are released from hatcheries each year, they upset the balance of food available in the ocean for all those other species.

"It's not leaving enough food for other salmon in the ocean," McMillan said. It's even negatively impacting orca populations, who feed on those other salmon species. You consume so much at the bottom of the food chain that it cascades to lower production at the top."

The best hatcheries, McMillan said, rear fish from wild stocks and release small but effective numbers to provide a short-term boost to the population.

McMillan said the analysis shows a need for more study of fish epigenetics — the study of how the environment a fish develops in can change and affect the way its genes work, the way it behaves and its ability to survive.

"There has been research coming out in the last four to five years indicating that even though hatchery fish are representative of the population at large from which they're from, they're undergoing epigenetic changes due to the hatchery rearing process," he said.

Some of those changes are passed along to offspring. Scientists are trying to study that process and discover whether those traits are passed to wild species and whether that affects the ability of wild fish to survive, he said.

Recent studies found that some hatchery fish struggle in waters heavily affected by climate change. Wild fish have had millions of years to evolve through conditions that, at times, have resembled the present. Though they may have similar DNA, the influence of hatchery conditions on fish could make them less prepared to survive in volatile ocean conditions than wild fish.

"Many of these wild fish have the genes to deal with these changing environments. But it's unclear whether the hatchery fish do," McMillan said.

This story was originally published in the Oregon Capital Chronicle, which is, like the Alaska Beacon, part of the States Newsroom network.

Peter Pan Seafood closes largest Alaska plant for this winter

By NATHANIEL HERZ
Northern Journal

In a major hit to Southwest Alaska's fishing industry, Peter Pan Seafood will keep its huge plant in the village of King Cove shuttered this winter, meaning that the company won't be processing millions of dollars worth of cod, pollock, crab, salmon and halibut.

"It's one of the most difficult days of my life," Rodger May, one of the company's owners and a longtime player in the seafood industry, said in a brief interview Thursday, Jan. 11 "It's just a devastating time for the industry."

The closure is the latest sign of the widening turmoil in Alaska seafood markets, which are contending with depressed global demand across many different species and intense competition from producers in Russia.

Last month, one of the industry's biggest processors, Trident Seafoods, said it would sell off four of its plants amid a restruc-

turing, including facilities in Petersburg and Ketchikan. And over the summer, salmon fishermen in Bristol Bay staged a floating protest of historically low prices offered for their catch.

"You can't keep on going to work producing product and selling it at a loss," May said, adding that Peter Pan remains "asset rich" and is not close to declaring bankruptcy. The King Cove plant is the company's largest processing facility.

The company first informed King Cove officials Jan. 11 about the closure. The plant contributes some \$2 million in yearly fish tax revenue for the community of 850 people at the western end of the Alaska Peninsula, about 600 air miles southwest of Anchorage.

The winter months that the plant will now stay closed typically generate roughly one-third of King Cove's municipal revenues, said Gary Hennigh, King Cove's city administrator. May worked with two in-

vestment firms — including Anchorage-based McKinley Capital Management, which was using money from the Alaska Permanent Fund — acquired Peter Pan in 2021 and made a splash in the industry by offering fishermen high prices for their catch.

But as the industry ran into trouble this year, signs of instability at the processing company had been popping up for months. In addition to King

Cove, the company has plants in Dillingham, Valdez and Port Moller.

An array of fishermen and companies filed liens against Peter Pan last year for unpaid deliveries of seafood, including, in December, one of the stars of the "Deadliest Catch" reality show.

Erik Velsko, a fishermen from Homer who delivered cod to Peter Pan last year, said his payments were months late,

and he plans to fish for Trident this winter instead. Other fishermen and boats, however, may not be able to find another processor to buy their catch.

"Trident, they can't just take every boat," Velsko said Jan. 11. "I think there are a lot of boats that don't have markets."

This article was originally published in the Northern Journal, a newsletter from Alaska journalist Nathaniel Herz.

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Police report

Monday, Jan. 8
 Violation condition of release: Arrested.
 Agency assist: U.S. Forest Service.
 Missing person.
 Welfare check.

Tuesday, Jan. 9
 Motor vehicle accident: Citation issued for failure to provide proof of insurance.
 Motor vehicle accident.

Wednesday, Jan. 10
 Reckless driving.

Thursday, Jan. 11
 Agency assist: Ambulance.

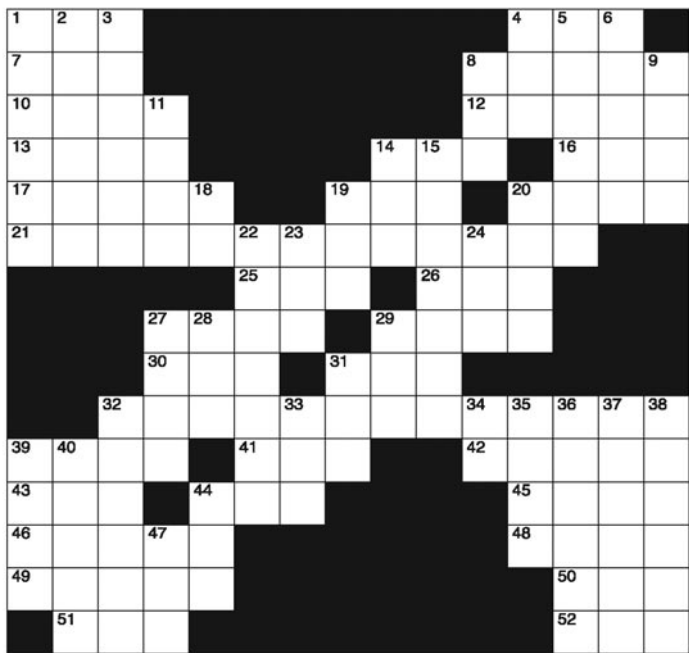
Friday, Jan. 12
 Traffic stop: Verbal warning for no headlights.

Saturday, Jan. 13
 Agency assist: Library.
 Agency assist: Search and rescue.

Sunday, Jan. 14
 Theft: Theft of gas from vehicle at airport.

Crossword

Answers on page 12



CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Microgram
- 4. Where golfers begin
- 7. Each
- 8. Warm weather metropolis
- 10. Coat with sticky substance
- 12. Girl's given name
- 13. Myth (Spanish)
- 14. Ultrahigh frequency
- 16. Former NBAer Jeremy
- 17. Where rockers work
- 19. Your consciousness of your own identity
- 20. Soft-finned fishes
- 21. Localities
- 25. Paddle
- 26. Union
- 27. Member of religious community
- 29. Small shrill flute
- 30. Small constellation in the Milky Way
- 31. They __
- 32. College kid on vacation
- 39. de Armas and Gasteyer are two
- 41. Part of the human body
- 42. A progressive grading
- 43. Sound unit
- 44. Noise some birds make
- 45. Abba __, Israeli politician
- 46. Portuguese city
- 48. Be extremely, uncritically fond of
- 49. Resembling old Norse poems
- 50. Ask for out of extreme need
- 51. Sino-Soviet block (abbr.)
- 52. Midway between south and southeast

CLUES DOWN

- 1. An insane person
- 2. __ Boothe Luce, American author
- 3. Buttock muscles
- 4. Men's fashion accessory
- 5. "Hotel California" rockers
- 6. Electronic communication
- 8. Magnetomotive force (abbr.)
- 9. Hostelrys
- 11. A way to resound
- 14. Exclamation: yuck!
- 15. A resident of Indiana
- 18. Exclamation of surprise
- 19. Make a mistake
- 20. Boundary
- 22. Antilles island
- 23. It's used to make furniture
- 24. Clod
- 27. They indicate where places are
- 28. Bobby __, NHL champ
- 29. Prints money
- 31. Honorable title (Turkish)
- 32. Appetizers
- 33. Midway between north and northwest
- 34. Spanish be
- 35. Breezed through
- 36. Grilled dishes
- 37. In a way, excites
- 38. Change mind
- 39. A French abbot
- 40. Popular candy
- 44. Partner to cheese
- 47. Wood or metal bolt

Alaska opts out of expanded summer food stamps program

By ANNIE BERMAN
 Anchorage Daily News

Alaska was one of 15 states to reject federal funding that would have provided direct grocery assistance this summer to thousands of families with children in the state who are facing increased food insecurity and rising food costs.

The new federal program would have meant an extra \$120 per child in direct funds this summer to families who qualify for free or reduced lunches — about half of all kids in Alaska.

Officials with Gov. Mike Dunleavy's administration cited a major food stamps backlog at the Alaska Division of Public Assistance as the reason for opting out of the program, which would have increased the workloads of staff who have been struggling for nearly a year to process benefits in a timely way.

Currently, there are around 8,000 Alaskans who have been waiting months to receive benefits through the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

"Eligibility technicians are working hard to clear up the backlog of SNAP applications and expect to have that completed by this spring," Caroline Hamp, a spokeswoman with the Alaska Department of Education, said in a statement Jan. 10. "Once the backlog of SNAP ap-

plications has been cleared, the departments will reconsider launching the (program)."

The summer food program is meant to offset the absence of meals provided to children during the school year. It is set to provide \$2.5 billion in grocery assistance to 21 million children nationwide beginning in June, according to a statement from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In Alaska, an estimated 58,000 children would have qualified for nearly \$7 million in federal funds this summer, according to an analysis by the Food Research & Action Center, a national nonprofit that focuses on reducing poverty-related hunger.

In December 2022, Congress made the summer program permanent effective in 2024 after the USDA had tested it for several years. The states that chose not to opt in for this summer will have a chance to join for summer 2025, the USDA said.

Governors in several other Republican-led states opted out of the program for this year, giving a range of reasons for the decision. In Iowa, Gov. Kim Reynolds said in a written statement the few restrictions on how the funds were spent would "do nothing to promote nutrition at a time when childhood obesity has become an epidemic," and that existing programs would

suffice to support the state's families.

Other states cited the administrative costs associated with the program.

In addition to Alaska, other states that opted out were: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Vermont and Wyoming.

The Cherokee Nation is one of the four tribes in Oklahoma and Mississippi that will be a part of the inaugural summer.

Jeff Turner, a spokesperson for Dunleavy, did not comment on the governor's stance on the program, deferring all questions to the Alaska Department of Education, which would have been responsible for administering the program.

Cara Durr, CEO of the Food Bank of Alaska, said her organization was "bummed" the state won't be participating in the federal program, calling it a "great resource for kids."

"I just hope that we as a state can get to a place with our systems where when something like this is available, we can participate and offer this to families," Durr said. "Because right now, we're still seeing really high levels of need."

The Associated Press contributed reporting for this story.

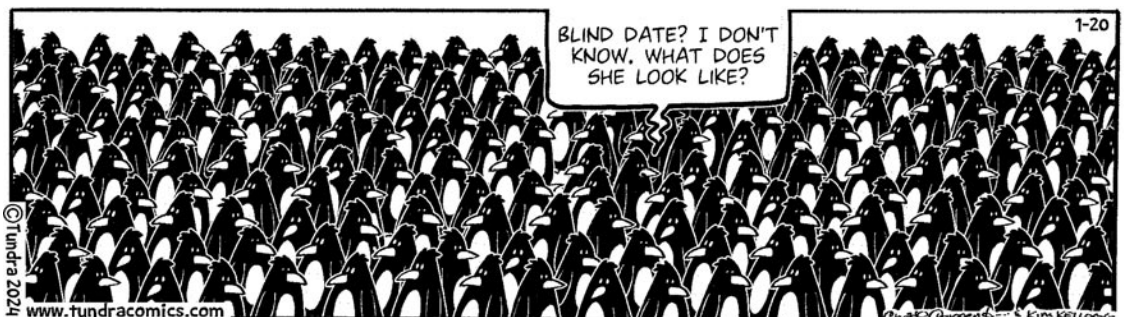
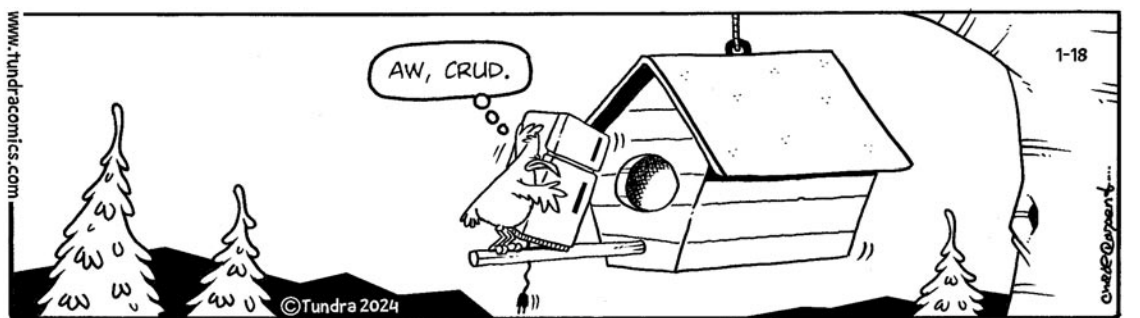
Ritter's River

by Marc Lutz



Tundra

by Chad Carpenter



CLASSIFIED

HELP WANTED

Wrangell Public Schools is accepting applications for the following positions:

• Facilities and Maintenance Director. The primary function of the Facilities and Maintenance Director is to plan, organize,

direct, and participate in the maintenance and operations of school district facilities and grounds. This position is also responsible for short- and long-range facilities planning to include major maintenance needs, capital construction, budgeting, and forecasting. The Maintenance Director approves all purchases at the division level, obtaining final approval from the Superintendent. This position has independent judgment and decision-making authority.

Minimum Qualifications include: High School Diploma or equivalent, minimum of five years in building maintenance crafts and operations; Alaska driver's license of ability to obtain one.

Desired qualification is successful supervisory or management experience. Knowledge of basic principles and practices of building maintenance crafts and operations such as: electrical systems; building automation systems; hydronic heating systems; oil-fired boilers; HVAC systems; fire sprinkler systems; organizational leadership abilities in complex organizations; and budget preparation and financial forecasting. This is a 12-month, full-time position with benefits, including Alaska State Retirement (PERS & SBS, health insurance, life insurance, and PTO). Salary is \$62,820 to \$89,743, DOE. For more information and a detailed job description, please contact the District Office at 907-874-2347. Anticipated start date is soon as possible, but no later than April 1, 2024.

• Paraprofessional: This is a part-time, 9-month classified

position working 5.75 hours per day. Salary placement is on Column A of the classified salary schedule. Job duties include but are not limited to working with students individually and in a small group settings in Special Education at Evergreen Elementary School. A high school diploma or equivalent is required. An associate degree, equivalent credits or the ability to pass the para pro assessment is also required. Start date is Feb. 1, 2024.

• Middle School Volleyball Head Coach: This is a part-time contracted position coaching volleyball for students in grades 6 through 8. Knowledge of volleyball is required; coaching experience is preferred.

For more information and a detailed job description, please contact the District Office at 907-874-2347. These positions are open until filled. It is Wrangell Public School District policy to not discriminate based on age, race, color, national origin, sex or disability.

HELP WANTED

The Sentinel needs a reporter. Newswriting experience preferred. Commitment to community journalism is essential. Call Larry at 907-351-8276 for more information.

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NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the matter of the estate of Gary A. Stevens, Notice to Creditors is hereby given that Susan Stevens has been appointed personal representative of the above named estate. Pursuant to Alaska Statute Title 13.16.450, all creditors are hereby notified to present their claims within four months after the date of first publication of this notice or said claims will forever be barred. Claims must be filed with the court (Case No. 1WR-23-00015PR) or be presented to:

Estate of Gary A. Stevens
 PO Box 247
 Wrangell, AK 99929

Publish Jan. 17, 24 and 31, 2024

CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL LEGAL NOTICE

Pursuant to the City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska, Borough Charter, Sec. 4, public notice is hereby given that the following ordinances listed by title only have been adopted by the Borough Assembly. Such ordinances are currently on file in the office of the Borough Clerk and may be inspected upon request.

- a. **Ordinance No. 1048** of the Assembly of the City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska, adding Chapter 10.15 – Trespass on Borough Property to Title 10 – Public Peace, Morals and Welfare, to the Wrangell Municipal Code.
- b. **Ordinance No. 1049** of the Assembly of the City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska, amending the Minor Offense fine schedule in Chapter 1.20, General Penalty, of the Wrangell Municipal Code.

Kim Lane, MMC, Borough Clerk
 City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska

Publish Jan. 17, 2024

CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL PUBLIC HEARING PUBLIC NOTICE

During the Regular Assembly Meeting of Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2024, starting at 6 p.m. in the Wrangell Borough Assembly Chambers at 205 Brueger Street, Wrangell, Alaska, there will be a PUBLIC HEARING on the following item(s):

- a. Request for the exchange of Borough-owned real property described as a portion of Parcel 7, A.S.L.S 84-83, zoned Commercial, adjacent to the Torgramsen-Glasner Subdivision, for a utility easement on real property described as a portion of Parcel 03-002-306, owned by Don Glasner, in accordance with WMC 16.12.080, for the purposes of preserving a utility easement demonstrating Borough site control for the Water Treatment Plant Improvement project, as outlined in the Memorandum dated Dec. 18, 2023, from the Borough's Economic Development Director.

Kim Lane, MMC, Borough Clerk
 City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska

Publish Jan. 17, 2024

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CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL PUBLIC MEETING NOTICE

Public Meeting for Wrangell Harbor Basin Floats System for RAISE Grant

There will be a Public Meeting on **Wednesday, Jan. 31, 2024, starting at 6 p.m.**, in the Borough Assembly Chambers on the following:

The City and Borough of Wrangell is applying for financial assistance under the 2024 Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) program for the purpose of financing harbor transportation improvements to three facilities within the Wrangell Harbor Basin. These facilities include Inner Harbor, Reliance Harbor and Standard Oil Float. The funds will be used for engineering design, survey, environmental permitting and construction for the replacement of the Wrangell Harbor Basin Floats System.

The purpose of the meeting is to engage the community regarding the project for the Inner Harbor, Reliance Harbor and Standard Oil Float. The public meeting will provide information to the public related to the project purpose and need, and consistency with the goals of the Borough's Comprehensive Plan, project alternatives considered and design features, as well as the social, economic, environmental and other impacts of the project. Conceptual drawings of the project will be available for review and discussion with Borough staff and our engineering partner. The public is encouraged to comment on such items as:

- Social impacts
- Economic impacts
- Environmental impacts
- Service area mobility and access
- Alternatives to the project
- Other identified issues

There may be a quorum of the Borough Assembly and Port Commission present, however, there will be no action taken.

Questions concerning the project or project ideas may be submitted prior, during, or after the public meeting, and no later than Feb. 14, 2024. Please drop off project comments or ideas in writing at City Hall or by email to smiller@wrangell.com. For more information, contact Steve Miller at 907-305-0336.

The public is encouraged to attend.

Kim Lane, MMC Borough Clerk
 City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska

Publish Jan. 17, 24 and 31, 2024

KETCHIKAN - PETERSBURG - WRANGELL SEAPA
 Southeast Alaska Power Agency
NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Board of Directors of the Southeast Alaska Power Agency (SEAPA) will hold an annual board meeting electronically on Jan. 25, 2024 from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. AKST in Ketchikan, Alaska. The purpose of the meeting is to elect officers, provide new board members an introduction to SEAPA, approve minutes, discuss evaluation forms, and authorize bank signatories. For additional information, please call 907-228-2281.
Publish Jan. 17, 2024

North Slope polar bear dies from avian flu; first known case

By YERETH ROSEN
Alaska Beacon

A polar bear found dead on Alaska's North Slope is the first of the species known to have been killed by the highly pathogenic avian influenza that is circulating among animal populations around the world.

The polar bear was found dead in October near Utqiagvik, the nation's northernmost community, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation reported.

The discovery of the virus in the animal's body tissue, a process that required sampling and study by the North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management and other agencies, confirmed in December that highly pathogenic avian influenza was the cause of death, said Dr. Bob Gerlach, Alaska's state veterinarian.

"This is the first polar bear case reported, for anywhere," Gerlach said. As such, it was reported to the World Organisation for Animal Health and has gotten attention in other Arctic nations that have polar bears, he said.

This was also the first Endangered Species Act-listed animal in Alaska known to fall victim to the disease. Polar bears, dependent on sea ice that is diminishing because of climate change, were listed as threatened in 2008.

While polar bears normally eat seals they hunt from the sea ice, it appears likely that this bear was scavenging on dead birds and ingested the influenza virus that way, Gerlach said. Numerous birds on the North Slope of various species have died from this avian influenza, according to the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

However, the bear need not have directly eaten an infected bird to have become sick, Gerlach said.

"If a bird dies of this, especially if it's kept in a cold environment, the virus can be maintained for a while in the environment," he said.

The polar bear death is a sign of the unusually persistent and lethal hold that this strain of highly pathogenic avian influenza has on wild animal populations two years after it arrived in North America, officials said.

"What we're dealing with now is a scenario that we

haven't dealt with in the past. And so there's no manual," said Andy Ramey, a U.S. Geological Survey wildlife geneticist and avian influenza expert.

Highly pathogenic avian influenza is called that because it spreads rapidly in flocks of domestic poultry, often requiring massive culls to control the contagions. Such outbreaks have been of concern in the past because of their economic consequences for global agriculture. Until recently, wild birds were afterthoughts. Though they were known to carry the viruses, ferrying them between domestic poultry populations, they were largely unaffected.

That has changed dramatically. The prior U.S. outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza, in 2014-15, resulted in some wild bird infections, and some influenza-caused bird die-offs occurred in Europe shortly thereafter. But the current version is considered unprecedented in its effect on wild birds and other wildlife.

"Across North America, and really around the world, lots of wild birds these days - I mean, thousands of wild birds these days, tens of thousands in some cases - are dying because of these highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses," Ramey said.

The disease has also killed a variety of mammals around the world.

In Alaska, three foxes, a black bear and a brown bear have died from this avian influenza. Elsewhere, more bears have been found dead after being infected by the virus, along with skunks, raccoons, mountain lions and large numbers of seals in eastern Canada and off the coasts of Maine and Washington state, as well as outside of North America.

The nation's first detection of the disease in a squirrel was confirmed in December in an animal found in Arizona.

To Gerlach, the polar bear case was not surprising, considering that black and brown bears have died. It is possible that more polar bears succumbed to the disease, but in remote places out of the view of people to record the events, he said.

Aside from the large and wide-ranging death toll in the wild, the current outbreak has some other differences, particularly its durability, as seen in

its persistence away from domestic flocks.

The virus that caused the 2014-15 outbreak spread in the wild bird populations for a while, but it "sort of fizzled out," Ramey said, probably because it was eventually stamped out in poultry operations.

But this one continues to be maintained in the wild, as evidenced by monitoring in Western Alaska, a place far from any big farms raising chickens or turkeys, he said.

Rather than winding down, it is continuing to spread across the world, Gerlach noted, even into bird populations in Antarctica, as has been recently documented. There are signs that it is now endemic in the wild, a fixed fea-

ture into the foreseeable future, he said. If so, "it's not going to go away. It's going to be here, and we have to have some way to deal with it," he said.

For Alaska, "a mixing area" for global bird migrations, spread of avian diseases is always an issue, Gerlach said. "Alaska is a catchall area for birds from North America or the Americas, as well as from Asia," he said.

The highly pathogenic avian influenza of 2014-15 was introduced from Asia to North America by wild birds migrating through Alaska. The current influenza is also crossing continents through Alaska, though from multiple directions, Ramey's research has found.

In a newly published study, Ramey and his research partners found what is likely to have been three separate and independent introductions of the virus into Alaska last year. His research, with colleagues from the USGS and other agencies, used genetic analysis to trace one form of influenza to North America and two to Asia.

There is little evidence that the current avian influenza wave poses an infection risk to humans. Only a few cases have been documented in the world, and those were general among people working with poultry.

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Scientists say marine heat waves are to blame for weak chum returns

By YERETH ROSEN
Alaska Beacon

Successive marine heat waves appear to have doomed much of the chum salmon swimming in the ocean waters off Alaska in the past year and probably account for the scarcities that have strained communities along Western Alaska rivers in recent years, a newly published study found.

In the much-warmer water temperatures that lingered in 2014-2019, juvenile chum salmon metabolism was super-charged, meaning they needed more food, said the study by scientists with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. But the food that was available was of low quality - things like jellyfish instead of the fat-packed krill and other prey they normally eat, the study said.

That means for the juvenile salmon trying to survive their first year at sea, "there's not much gas in the tank," said the study's lead author, Ed Farley, manager of NOAA Fisheries' Alaska Ecosystem Monitoring and Assessment Program.

Juvenile chum salmon that swam from spawning areas in the rivers suffered what was essentially a double hit, said Farley, who works in the NOAA Fisheries Auke Bay Laboratories in Juneau. They encountered one extreme heat wave in their critical first summer when they were in the northern Bering Sea and then, when they entered their wintering grounds in the Gulf of Alaska, swam into the tail end of another extreme heat wave, he said.

It's likely that large amounts of the population died out in the ocean, Farley said.

Chum salmon typically spend one to four years in the ocean, swimming between the Bering

Sea and the Gulf of Alaska as the seasons change, according to NOAA.

Chum salmon make up a large portion of the traditional diet for Indigenous residents living along Western Alaska rivers. In past years, commercial chum salmon harvests were also important income sources in villages. But recent years' crashes caused extreme hardship in those communities.

After 2019, conditions cooled considerably in the Bering Sea, Farley said. In those more normal conditions, NOAA surveys have found that juvenile salmon appear to be packing on the fat that they need to survive, though there are far fewer of them than there used to be.

That leads to some optimism about upcoming chum salmon runs along the Kuskokwim and Yukon rivers and elsewhere in Western Alaska rivers, where communities depend on the fish, he said.

"This just means, I think, that we're seeing a turning point," he said.

But the improvement may be only temporary as the global climate warms, he acknowledged.

Since the 1990s, there have been increases in the frequency and intensity of marine heat waves in the North Pacific, according to scientists. Projections are for that trend to accelerate, both globally and in the North Pacific Ocean off Alaska in particular.

That leaves fishery managers with the "very difficult question" of how to cope with the marine heat to come, Farley said.

"It's going to happen. It's happening quicker than we thought," he said.

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